Catch that colorful cap

Exhibit at Clark College's Archer Gallery wants to make you think anew about the environmental impact of plastic bottle tops
Cover Story

Floor-only effort on display at Clark College

By MATT WATRADOWSKI

Portland artist Steven Beauty — a California transplant — was walking around downtown Portland in January 2006, looking for inspiration and combating the Pacific Northwest’s dreary winter.

“I need something with color,” Beauty thought. He wasn’t finding it in the gray Portland skies.

Soon, a bright red Ochrealla juice bottle cap floated by in the gutter.

“It was the brightest thing on the street at the time,” he said. “It seemed cartoonish bright.”

The bright red cap, coupled with Beauty’s concerns for the environment, inspired him to begin creating works with bottle caps. Beauty, 43, teamed with fellow Portland artist Laurel Kurtz, 36, for a series of bottle cap exhibits, the latest of which opened this week at Clark College’s Archer Gallery.

A variety of bottle caps, including caps from soda bottles, cat-litter jugs, margarita tubs and laundry-detergent containers, will cover most of the gallery’s 1,650 square feet, said Baile Shell, Archer Gallery curator.

Artists, clockwise from left, Mark Jordania, Laurel Kurtz and Steven Beauty, collaborated on an exhibit made up entirely of bottle caps at Clark College’s Archer Gallery. The exhibit is the first floor-only exhibit from Kurtz and Beauty. The duo have previously tied caps together with zip ties to create sculptures and displayed piles of caps.

If you go
- **Where:** Bottle cap art by Steven Beauty and Laurel Kurtz.
- **When:** 10 a.m. to 7 p.m., Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Fridays, noon to 5 p.m. Saturdays through Dec. 30.
- **Where:** Clark College’s Archer Gallery, inside the Penguin Union Building, 1933 Fort Vancouver Way, Vancouver.
- **Information:** 360-594-2246 or clark.edu/archergallery.

Beautiful and Kurtz, who worked with fellow Portland artists David Pozzi and Mark Jordania for the exhibit, have covered the gallery floor with bottle caps of all shapes and sizes to raise awareness about recycling and the impact that stray bottle caps can have on the environment. The artists hope to use the concept of a sea of caps to illustrate how easily caps can wind up in oceans.

“We’re just trying to spread awareness,” Kurtz said. “People can make their own decisions about how they want to approach that. We’re not trying to be preachy.”

The bottle caps typically illustrate the products they are attached to and aren’t easily recycled, Beauty said.

“Most people, once they’ve interacted with one of our pieces, they think of bottle caps differently,” he added.

Visitors will be able to add to Beauty and Kurtz’s growing collection by tossing caps into a bin at the exhibit. The artists appreciate the donations but have advice for anyone who wants to lend a hand.

“Always rinse them,” Beauty said. “We spend hours and hours washing. We’ve handled every cap and washed them in bleach. It took a long, long time.”